



Affirmation:

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BY: ~~United Methodists~~ **United Methodists for Gay and Lesbian Concerns**

ANNUAL CONFERENCE ACTIONS

A relatively new adjective has cropped up in this year's round of Annual Conference actions on gay and lesbian issues. Practicing has joined self-avowed as a description of the kind of homosexual many Annual Conferences don't want to ordain or appoint. Typical is the Kentucky Conference action that links both adjectives in a single succinct motion: The assembly unanimously urged the 1984 General Conference to prohibit the ordination or appointment of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Missouri West took similar action.

In East Ohio the assembly affirmed the United Methodist stance on homosexuality. By a 681-531 vote, the members also opposed candidacy to ordained ministry and recommended termination of pastor status for persons "practicing homosexuality or promoting its practice as an acceptable Christian lifestyle." North Georgia "reaffirmed the UMC stand against the acceptance or practice of homosexuality within the clerical leadership of the UMC." They will ask the 1984 General Conference "to continue and strengthen its present stand against condoning the acceptance or practice of homosexuality as an acceptable Christian lifestyle and express it in such a man-

ner that it will be understood by all United Methodists."

However, not all United Methodist Annual Conferences are of one mind. The Northern New Jersey conference asked the 1984 General Conference to delete the section of the Social Principles which says, "Though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." In the Yellowstone conference, the conference members, while affirming the authority of Scripture, denied that the Bible states clearly that homosexual acts are sins. The assembly also defeated by a substantial margin a petition to specifically prohibit ordination of "practicing" homosexuals, leaving that judgment to the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. The Conference called on all UMs to minister to homosexual persons. The body agreed to petition the 1984 General Conference to change the Social Principles statement that says "...we do not condone the practice of homosexuality..." to "...we do not condone the practices of fornication, adultery or sexual promiscuity by any person, heterosexual or homosexual..."

Some actions were simply addressed to
(Cont. on p. 6)

TROY STOKES UPDATE

In June Troy Stokes of Austin, Texas was elected to the Southwest Texas Conference Board of Church and Society with the clear intention that, as a gay person and an active layman, he would be able to make a valuable contribution in preparing for an educational conference on ministry to homosexuals and their families planned for 1983. He was already working with the Board when, at their spring, 1982 meeting, they requested his nomination for election as a full board member.

Since Troy's annual conference election, criticism and pressure from local church members has led Bishop Ernest Dixon to poll conference delegates, asking them if the conference should reconvene to reconsider its vote to seat

Troy on the Board. The vote on the special session is reported to be close. Bishop Dixon called a meeting of the Cabinet and the Conference Committee on the Episcopacy for Thursday, August 5. Presumably an announcement would be made following the meeting. If a called session is held, September 11 has been projected as a target date.

In a telephone conversation Troy said that he and his lover had been prepared for controversy over his election but that they really weren't ready for the intense pressure they have been under in recent days. The next Affirmation newsletter will include later developments, and reflections on what we may learn from them. In the meantime watch the church press for news.

Actions in many Annual Conferences this summer indicate the church's need to confront the ways homophobia limits its ministry, both by marginalizing gay and lesbian clergy and by inhibiting outreach to gay and lesbian Christians. A major part of Affirmation's ministry to the denomination and to the church at large is in enabling this to happen.

Members of the Pacific and Southwest Affirmation group were instrumental in working with that conference's MFSA chapter to identify homophobia as a pivotal issue. The result was an excellent luncheon at which theologian Howard Rice challenged listeners to a more positive stance.

At the National Council of Churches "Crossroads 82" - an ecumenical training event in young adult ministry - we observed the hunger of persons from many backgrounds to gain information and have opportunities to clarify their attitudes about homosexuality. Affirmation members from the Washington, DC and Chicago areas joined me and a colleague from Minneapolis in conducting four workshops

and literally dozens of individual and small group sessions at the week long Lake Geneva, Wisconsin event in June. A grant from the American Lutheran Church to the NCC made possible participation by myself and by the chair of the Twin Cities Lesbian & Gay Interfaith Council.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action held its Jubilee Celebration in Washington, DC during July. Themed "Witness in the Belly of the Beast," the conference gave MFSA members an opportunity to demonstrate at the White House as well as to participate in a variety of workshops. Sharon Owens, Ava Scott and I led a workshop on "Homophobia: Continuing Struggle in the Church," backed up by a wonderful delegation from Mid-Atlantic Affirmation. Among other actions, the assembly voted a resolution calling on MFSA to work toward elimination of the negative language in the Discipline about homosexuality. It was a special joy that the resolution originated in the MFSA Executive Committee without the necessity of Affirmation initiation.

(Cont. on p. 6)

a review

THE NEW RELIGIOUS POLITICAL RIGHT IN AMERICA by Samuel S. Hill & Dennis E. Owen. Abingdon, 1982. 160pp.

When I decided to read Hill and Owens book, I must admit that I felt a little smug and condescending. How could a movement so opposed to what I thought "intelligent, sensitive" people believe be taken seriously in 1982? I knew about the unexpected election upsets the NRPR had engineered. I remembered sadly and angrily their opposition to the pro-choice movement, to feminism, to the ERA and to gay and lesbian rights. I rankled at their unquestioning support of the nuclear family, sex-role stereotyping, and a federal budget that was and is top heavy with exorbitant and unnecessary military spending. Surely the NRPR was an aberration during a difficult historical time! After reading and reflecting on THE NEW RELIGIOUS POLITICAL RIGHT IN AMERICA, I am impressed with the complexity and the thoroughness of its organizational structure, more realistic about its place in American society in the 80's, and awed by its potential power as a religious and political force.

Hill and Owen's book is tightly written, loaded with many facts and names. It is not an easy book to read, but it is a significant book for persons who are concerned with the phenomenon of the growing right in our culture.

Primary on their list of causes is their fear of the moral and spiritual deterioration of life in the United States. The disease afflicting the U.S. is secular humanism, personified in religious and political liberals. The NRPR caricatures secular humanists as the "do your own thing" people, a caricature with an uncomfortable degree of truth to it. The NRPR on the other hand is made up largely of independent Baptist congregations, other fundamentalist groups, and "politically conservative people who would be members of such churches if they were members of any church." (p. 15) They live by and preach what they believe is a vision of what God wills for American society--not the good society, but the perfect society, based on biblical righteousness and holiness. The Truth they have for America is not derived by searching and by dialogue. The Truth of the NRPR is one

(Cont. on p. 5)

Boston Meeting

3

Racism, sexism, classism....what do these words really mean? How can one get past the words to a common definition of them? What do these "isms" have to do with us as individuals, as lesbians and gay men and with Affirmation as an organization? What does a commitment to justice mean in relation to these issues? These are some of the questions to be asked and explored at the national Affirmation meeting September 17-19 in Boston.

The meeting in Boston will look specifically at the problems of racism, sexism, and classism and their relationship to and influence on our personal lives and the life of our organization. This meeting will be a continuation of a process of education and self-examination begun at the Nashville meeting, April, 1981. We will be privileged to have Norene Carter as a resource person for the Weekend. Ms. Carter, who has worked extensively in the areas of racism, sexism, and classism, will lead us through an in-depth exploration of our commitment to justice in these areas and the implications of this commitment.

Participants should plan to be present for the entire meeting, arriving no later than 7:00p.m. Friday night and leaving no earlier than 12:00noon on Sunday. Housing will be provided in private homes in the Boston area. The registration fee for the meeting is \$20 and should be returned no later than September 10 with the completed registration form.

Once the form has been received, you will be sent specific directions on how to find your way from the airport, train station, etc. to the place of meeting.

Come and participate in this exciting and challenging weekend of exploration and direction-setting!!

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY

Day - Coordinating Committee meets

Evening - Welcome

Opening address, Ms. Carter

Entertainment, local persons

SATURDAY

Morning - Meditation

Time for sharing what's happening around the country

Exploration of our personal experiences regarding racism, sexism and classism

Noon - Lunch at place of meeting

Afternoon - Task Force meetings

3-7:30 - Break

Evening - Exploration of racism, Sexism, Classism from two perspectives:

1) Lesbian/Gay Theology

2) Specific implications for Affirmation as an Organization

SUNDAY

Morning - Business meeting

Noon - Adjourn

REGISTRATION FORM

Name _____ Phone () _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

I will be arriving in Boston by _____
(air, bus, train, car....please give travel plans so that you may be sent specific instructions)

I will need housing for the weekend (check here) ☐

Please return this form plus a \$20.00 registration fee to Leanne Tigert

~~Waltham, MA~~

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 10

Mark Bowman

Washington, DC

Morris Floyd

Minneapolis, MN

Mary Gaddis

Holy City, CA

Lyle Loder

Los Angeles, CA

Ava Scott

Philadelphia, PA

Leanne Tigert

Waltham, MA



AFFIRMATION

PLEASE NOTE

Affirmation wishes to continue its commitment to inclusiveness of all races, sexes, and classes in its meetings and activities. Affirmation's financial commitment to this inclusiveness comes in its plan to implement a travel pool to assist folks in attending its twice-a-year meetings. The Travel pool is not yet in operation, but the group still wishes to assist in whatever way possible those persons who are interested in attending the Boston meeting but who cannot meet the total costs. If you need to tap into this commitment, please contact any member of the Coordinating Committee to explore options for assistance.

DATES FOR NATIONAL MEETINGS

September 17-19, 1982 BOSTON

April 8-10, 1983 LOS ANGELES

September 16-18, 1983 BALTIMORE

April 27-29, 1984 (tent.) . . . BALTIMORE

If you have not recently updated your Affirmation Newsletter "Subscription now is the time to do so! Affirmation Newsletters are available for \$15 a year (sent bulk rate without an envelope) or for \$20 a year (sent first class in plain envelope). To update your subscription, or to receive our publication for the first time, mail a check and your name and address to:

AFFIRMATION

Evanston, Illinois

AN INVITATION

An invitation is hereby formally extended by the Communications Task Force to the Readers of the Affirmation Newsletter to participate in the sharing of timely information.

WE INVITE:

Comments and Suggestions on the Newsletter specifically, and about ways we may better meet your needs.

Letters for Publication - we request that these letters be clearly labeled "for publication" so we do not by mistake print letters not for publication. We also ask that you always include your name and then indicate how you would like the letter signed, if at all.

News and Announcements of events and general interest items within your community and beyond.

Personal and Formal Accounts of gay and lesbian activities which have recently occurred.

Stories, Poems, and Drawings of your personal journey, personal struggles, beliefs, theology, joys, experiences, etc.

Publications and Newsletters or any printed materials your group utilizes so that we may share parts of them with our readers.

Address all correspondence and send all items for the Newsletter to:

NASHVILLE AFFIRMATION

Nashville, TN

(Cont. from p. 2)

which is only divulged by recognition of authority, their authority to "not let the flag go down the drain." The program of the NRPR is based on the reassertion and the re-establishment of traditional Anglo-American culture and values as interpreted by their leadership.

Hill and Owen remind us that only a small minority of Evangelicals line up with the NRPR. Its demonstrated political clout, then, seems out of proportion to its size. NRPR's organizational efficiency may be a more accurate indicator of why it has been so successful.

The authors assert that, even though the preachments of the NRPR may be repugnant to many, the power and the danger of the NRPR is in its organization and structure. The authors describe its organization and structure as totalitarian. People who join the NRPR usually feel that they have lost control of their own lives. However, by joining the NRPR they join an authoritarian organization that does not allow dissent or difference and maintains conformity by

closely prescribing what its members are to believe and how they are to live. It is the relentless, inflexible organization and structure of the NRPR that forebodes ill for American society, especially for NRPR's enemies among whom gays and lesbians are high on the list.

THE NEW RELIGIOUS POLITICAL RIGHT IN AMERICA raises the questions of where the NRPR fits into the American Religious tradition, of what its theological and ethical orientation is, of how other religious communities react to the NRPR, of its relationship to the well-established tradition of American civil religion, and of how a loss of a "public," a "human community," is the most significant factor in the ascendancy of the NRPR. If you have not taken the NRPR seriously, do so. If you have been terrified and unnerved by its rapid power-brokering, become more realistic about the NRPR's role in American society. Read THE NEW RELIGIOUS POLITICAL RIGHT IN AMERICA and be ready to ask difficult questions of its members and of yourself.

FLOYD FACES INVOLUNTARY LEAVE

Morris Floyd, Affirmation Coordinating Committee member and spokesperson, was placed on an involuntary leave of absence by the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference at its June session. The action followed months of negotiation between Floyd, Bishop Jack Tuell and the Cabinet, in which discussions focused on the appropriateness of Floyd's present position as a special appointment. Morris moved to Minneapolis last August to become director of Lesbian and Gay Community Services, a professional community mental health organization.

The Cabinet's stated reason for requesting the leave of absence was that Morris' move to Minneapolis was made without securing the Bishop's prior approval. Floyd requested the change in appointment last June; Bishop Tuell's negative response, dated September 1, was received three weeks after the proposed effective date of the appointment.

Supporting Morris in his objection to the involuntary leave was the Pacific and Southwest Chapter of MFSA as well as clergy and laity members of Affirmation in the Los Angeles area.

Although the fact that Morris is openly gay was never officially the issue, Bishop Tuell has made it plain

that he does not intend to offer future appointments. The Bishop is reported to have been ready to surrender his role as presider over the executive session of the Conference in order to offer arguments against the appointment of gay and lesbian clergy. This became unnecessary when spoken opposition to the leave failed to materialize in a special executive session called to debate the question.

Floyd has said he will appeal to the Judicial Council the constitutionality of a leave of absence imposed as it has been done in this case. The Conference Board of Ordained Ministry will meet this Fall to consider its posture in regard to openly gay and lesbian clergy. Persons on both sides of the question in the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference expressed frustration at members' failure to take the opportunity for a complete airing of opinions and insights. It seems likely however that such discussion will occur next year as a result of recommendations from the Board of Ordained Ministry and a Conference-mandated study on homophobia and homosexuality being prepared by the Conference Boards of Church and Society and Discipleship.

(Cont. from p. 1)

Conference practices. The Northwest Texas Conference asked its bishop not to appoint homosexuals. The Western Pennsylvania Conference accepted a cabinet statement instructing all groups involved in candidacy decisions not to approve the candidacy, or accept for conference membership or ordination, a practicing homosexual. The Southwest Texas Conference defeated 217-177 a motion to remove Troy Stokes from the conference Board of Church and Society.

With a nod to a trad. passion for states rights, the members of the South Georgia Conf. affirmed the position of the UMC on homosexuality but expressed concern over differing applications of general church law on the issue by several annual conferences. "While we staunchly defend the right of the several annual conferences of the UMC to determine, under the DISCIPLINE, the membership of their respective conferences," said the assembly, "we, just as staunchly, affirm that those rights must be exercised and administered in conformity with the general law of the church as embodied in the DISCIPLINE." They will ask the 1984 General Conference to ensure that the "law of the church is upheld and administered in a uniform manner by all annual conferences...."

Several statements or actions came in

response to Bishop Wheatley's actions and to the charges brought against him. Wisconsin voted support of Bishop Wheatley. (They also opposed the Family Protection bill, U.S. Senate bill 1378.) North Arkansas defeated 159-152 a resolution expressing "dismay" at both the appointment of a homosexual in the Rocky Mountain Conference and the subsequent exoneration of the bishop. Central Pennsylvania adopted a resolution which affirms "the clear teaching of the Bible on the issue of homosexuality as an aspect of original sin and therefore to be repented of."

In Bishop Wheatley's own Rocky Mountain Conference not much time was spent on the issue. A motion calling the conference to oppose the ordination of avowed homosexuals was tabled. Later, the body affirmed their intentions to leave the issue open for local church study. The members "strongly reaffirm our bond of love and Christian understanding for each other, the Body of Christ: lay, clergy and episcopacy."

Relatively few annual conferences spoke to gay and lesbian issues this year. According to Newscope from which the information reported here is taken, 18 out of 73 conferences and missionary conferences had some kind of discussion of gay and lesbian issues.

(Cont. from p. 2)

In other networking efforts, I will meet during August with Dallas Affirmation members, with persons from the Southwest Texas Gay Caucus, and with members and friends of Affirmation in the New Orleans area. In addition, I will conduct a workshop on "Homosexuality, Homophobia and the Church" in New Orleans on August 16.

These workshops are terrific opportunities not only for their educational value, but also for building our network of members and friends. We learned during the last quadrennium that, when well done, they do make a difference. I'd like to do one a month for the next sixteen months - perhaps you can help arrange one in your area. More and more Conference organizations of United Methodist Women, Councils on Ministry, and Boards consider this a helpful ministry. Let's build support by allowing people to know us, at least through our spokespersons, Coordinating Committee members and visible people on the local level.

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